

Columbus/Bartholomew Planning Department
Annual Report:
2003

Department Overview

Year 2003 was a quiet but busy year in Planning. There were fewer spectacular new developments, compared to the previous three or four years; however, the quantity of work increased steadily over earlier years. This pattern is not surprising, in light of three trends: the slow recovery of the Indiana economy generally; the saturated housing market (in most categories) in Bartholomew County; and the number of commercial buildings that stood empty as 2003 began but were filled by year's end.

Major planning projects in 2003 included construction and opening of the new Menard store; commencement of work on the Target and Dairy Queen projects at Columbus Center; continuing successful redevelopment at Clifty Crossing Shopping Center; occupation of one of the Lowe's outlots by Golden Corral; several redevelopment projects in the Central Avenue corridor from 10th to 25th Street; and (re)approval of the Columbus Learning Center, along with other Airport-property development. Residential projects included the Presidential Parks North residential development and the Canterbury Court apartment complex, both on Rocky Ford Road.

Internally, the Planning staff, along with Engineering, wrapped up the city's Thoroughfare Plan – a key element in the comprehensive plan. Work began on the massive task of rewriting the zoning and subdivision ordinances for both city and county. The staff helped facilitate formation of the Metropolitan Planning Organization and provided technical assistance to the Riverfront Development working group. Planning was instrumental in resolving the issue of where to reconstruct Central Middle School, and helped coordinate contingency planning for the possible major expansion of activity at the Army's Camp Atterbury.

The Planning Department is proud of its record in saving the taxpayers' money. Our work is accomplished within a budget of under a half-million dollars annually. We have routinely spent less than our authorized appropriation, without compromising quality of service.

City and County Plan and Ordinance Updates

After adoption of the Columbus Land Use Element of the Comprehensive Plan (usually known as Phase 2) in early May 2002, discussions began on how and when to approach what's been called "Phase 3" – i.e., rewriting the Zoning and Subdivision Control ordinances to align with the two Plan elements. The city had originally planned to begin working on this phase with the help of outside consultants in early 2003. However, the budget difficulties experienced by Indiana state and local governments meant that many non-essential tasks were put on hold. After the crunch eased somewhat in late 2003, the city finally executed a contract with McBride-Dale-Clarion Associates to commence the formal update process. (McBride-Dale is the same firm that oversaw the two Comprehensive Plan phase updates.) A citizen's advisory committee was formed and a kickoff meeting held in mid-fall. An interesting feature of this update is that ordinance drafts will be available for reading review on the city's website.

The Bartholomew County Comprehensive Plan implementation phase also moved forward in 2003. The Implementation Committee has held regular meetings since June to revise the zoning and subdivision control ordinances based on elements of the comprehensive plan that were adopted in 1999 and 2003. The committee consists of several plan commissioners, experts in various fields, and members of the public with an interest in the ordinances. Opportunities for public review and comment on draft ordinances will be scheduled in 2004.

Thoroughfare Plan Update

The City Council adopted the new Thoroughfare Plan in June 2003, after favorable recommendation from the Plan Commission the month before. The Commission ratified several minor amendments to the Plan at its July 3 meeting, which action officially replaced the old Thoroughfare Plan for the mid-1970s. Dave Hayward, project engineer with the Christopher Burke & Associates consulting engineering firm, oversaw the process. The new Plan has guided the planning and engineering staff and elected and appointed officials in several decisions.

State Street Revitalization Grant

Work began in 2003 on the State Street Revitalization Plan. An advisory committee was formed to identify problems and opportunities. Consultants gathered information, including existing conditions and market data, which was then presented to the advisory committee and the public. The consultants are currently preparing a draft revitalization plan based on public input that will be presented in early 2004.

Metropolitan Planning Organization

The city and county struggled with the logistics of bringing the MPO into being in 2003, finally achieving success late in the year. The city and county acquiesced in the MPO's formation and agreed to its boundaries in early 2003, but the Town of Edinburgh's reluctance to participate was a barrier to full implementation. According to secondhand reports, Edinburgh's Town Council eventually voted not to participate in the MPO at this time. Meanwhile, the city and county

moved forward with adopting an Interlocal Agreement confirming the particulars of our joint participation. The first Policy Council meeting is being set up for early January 2004.

Zoning Map Changes

Planned Unit Developments

Sixteen applications for new PUD rezonings, modifications to existing PUDs, and/or final PUD plans were received. Some of these were minor modifications and as such could be reviewed by staff alone; however, three were major modifications and two were for brand-new developments. Perhaps the most significant was the Western Hills Crossing proposal. This was to be a 180-acre residential development in Ohio Township, consisting of 11 homesites of between 10 and 20 acres each, to be served by public water but with individual septic sewage disposal. Both Plan Commission and City Council were split on the proposal, which was seen as a test case for the city's new Land Use Plan and its discouraging language concerning new septic tanks. The Council ultimately turned down the request.

Other important PUD requests in 2003 included major modifications to the approved Columbus Center redevelopment plan to accommodate Target and Dairy Queen, continued development of the Lowe's outlots, rezoning the Wal-Mart Supercenter to PUD, and Phase III of Shadow Creek Farms.

Special Use Rezonings, SU Development Plans

The city considered 13 petitions involving special use zoning. Five of the 13 were full-scale rezoning petitions. Four were recommended for approval by the Plan Commission and subsequently adopted by City Council; the fifth was filed too late for the December Plan Commission agenda and will be taken up in January. One petition involved major modifications to an existing special use site plans, for the Columbus Learning Center. The staff also reviewed and approved seven special use site plans under the minor-modification procedure.

Other Rezonings

Year 2003 was a busy period for rezoning petitions. Excluding PUD and special use rezonings, there were 15 rezoning requests processed in 2003. The Plan Commission recommended approval of 12 and denial of two; the 15th petition is still pending. The City Council concurred with the Plan Commission's recommendation on nine of the rezoning requests, and two were withdrawn before Council final action (both having received unfavorable recommendations from the Commission.) Four cases have yet to be finalized.

Bartholomew County Zoning Map Changes

Four rezoning matters were processed by the Bartholomew County Plan Commission. All four were initiated by the Commission itself and dealt with inappropriately zoned property; for example, there are still a few remaining industrial districts along old railroad rights-of-way that have long since been abandoned. All four rezonings were approved by the County Commissioners upon recommendation by the Plan Commission.

Zoning Text Amendments

The Columbus Zoning Ordinance was amended twice in 2003. One amendment clarified the front setback in situations in which additional right-of-way has been acquired after establishment of a setback line; the other allowed residential development in the extraterritorial jurisdiction to be served by volunteer firefighters rather than the City of Columbus Fire Department.

Two other text amendments to the city Zoning Ordinance were proposed but not as yet adopted. An amendment is pending at City Council to provide that model homes be approved by the BZA and to eliminate the current maximum 18-month duration. The last amendment deals with signage for model homes and open-house events; although no amendment has yet been drafted, this discussion is ongoing.

Bartholomew County processed one text amendment in 2003, concerning technical aspects of signage regulation in commercial and industrial districts.

Both city and county currently have parallel amendments in progress to align floodplain regulations with current FEMA Community Rating System guidelines.

Annexation

In 2002, the planning department processed three annexation petitions, all of which were recommended favorably by Plan Commission and approved by City Council. Two of these petitions involved vacant land on which development has subsequently been initiated (the former Puckett property on CR 175 W and the land north of Rocky Ford Road that is currently being platted for the Presidential Parks North residential development. The third petition was for Calvary Church of the Nazarene, which is nearly surrounded by Presidential Parks North.

Subdivisions

The chart below summarizes the department's subdivision review during 2000.

Type of Subdivision	City of Columbus	Bartholomew County	Joint District
Administrative & Agricultural	42	39	0
Minor	16	28	1
Concept Plan	n/a	1	0
Major Preliminary	4	1	0
Major Final	2	0	0

Steady levels of subdivision activity continue in both city and county, although the pace has slowed slightly since the late 1990s. The county still sees more subdivision plats filed than the city, as is typical and expected.

Right-of-Way Vacations

During 2003, the staff processed two petitions to vacate public rights-of-way in the city's jurisdiction and one for Bartholomew County. Indiana law provides that these vacations can be accomplished only by an ordinance adopted by the legislative body. Both city petitions were approved; the county petition is pending.

Street Renaming Requests

Four requests to rename existing streets in the City of Columbus jurisdiction were processed in 2003, and one such request was processed for Bartholomew County. All were approved. Notable actions were renaming (Old) Carr Hill Road and Brex Park Drive to avoid confusion when the Menard development got underway, and petitions to name two unnamed streets in city parks, including Carl Miske Drive in Millrace Park.

Board of Zoning Appeals

Variances for setback encroachments and relief of the 10-acre agricultural remainder provision, for subdividing farm land, were the most common requests in the city. There was no trend or reoccurring request in the County, but the most notable case was for an ATV track to be located near the town of Waymansville. This case drew considerable attention from the neighborhood and was ultimately withdrawn at the petitioner's request.

Both the City and County Boards of Zoning Appeals saw an increase in the request to operate home-based businesses. In addition the County heard a few petition's to allow the temporary placement of mobile homes in residential districts to accommodate elderly relatives who needed medical attention.

The City and County BZA both had a number of cases dealing with telecommunication towers. Both the height and use of the towers were reviewed. While the number of petitions for new towers remained significant, there were many collocation requests reviewed by staff. This may indicate that a comprehensive plan is needed to circumvent the construction of new towers when collocation is possible.

Finally, changes again occurred in the BZA staff. Stephanie Carr, joined staff as a Secretary to the Columbus Board of Zoning Appeals. She replaced Judy Walters who served as Secretary to the Board for 16 years before retiring. Stephanie has several years of experience with public administration in the County and is doing very well.

BZA: City Requests

Type	2003	2002	2001	2000
Developmental Standards Variance 3Developmental Standards Variance	19	13	24	14
Use Variances	0	2	0	0
Conditional Use Permits	10	9	8	6
Total City Requests	29	24	32	20

BZA: City Approvals

Type	2003	2002	2001	2000
Developmental Standards Variance 3Developmental Standards Variance	12	12	16	11
Use Variances	0	1	0	0
Conditional Use Permits	7	5	3	5
Total City Approvals	19	18	19	16

BZA: County Requests

Type 4Type	2003	2002	2001	2000
Developmental Standards Variances	6	9	8	7
Conditional Use Permits	11	9	5	9
Use Variances	1	1	2	0
Total County Requests	18	19	15	16

BZA: County Approvals

Type	2003	2002	2001	2000
Developmental Standards Variance 3Developmental Standards Variance	5	8	8	8
Use Variances	1	1	1	0
Conditional Use Permits	10	3	3	5

Total County Approvals	16	12	12	10
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Flood Plain Management

The City has continued its commitment to protect its citizens from the ravages of flooding. In October of 2003, the City of Columbus was again certified to participate in the Community Rating System Program. This voluntary program provides an opportunity for participating communities to provide their residents discounts on flood insurance. Some of the many ways the City has worked to maintain its certification is by adopting and enforcing more stringent flood plain ordinances than required by both the State and Federal Government, providing flood plain analysis and determinations to property owners and real estate associated companies, maintaining green space and parks in areas prone to annual flooding and mapping the Special Flood Hazard Areas on the GIS system.

Landscape Review Committee

The city's Landscape Review Committee, chaired by Patricia Zeigler, has been a successful alternative to the Board of Zoning Appeals and a useful adjunct to Plan Commission and staff review of development proposals. The small size and informal nature of the LRC makes it possible to negotiate landscape solutions that suit the needs of the city and the property owners.

The LRC's workload continues to be strong. During 2003, the committee considered five landscape plans which did not meet the letter of the zoning ordinance. All five were approved, in some cases after considerable review time.

Signs

Signage issues comprise one of the biggest parts of the Planning Department's workload. Of the 248 ZCCs issued in 2002, 108 were for signs - close to 50 percent. These ranged from simple temporary banners to signage schemes for major developments.

Sign Development Plans: The Zoning ordinance allows a large-scale project such as a shopping center or planned residential development to apply for a Sign Development Plan as an alternative to the standard regulations. These plans are reviewed by the Plan Commission. Typically, approval involves a trade-off between decreasing one category of signage in return for increasing another. In 2003, three sign development plans were reviewed and approved.

Here is a month-by-month breakdown of ZCC applications, by type:

Month	Total	Signs
Jan	22	9
Feb	18	10
Mar	23	8
Apr	19	12
May	27	7
Jun	32	11
Jul	18	9
Aug	16	6
Sep	13	5
Oct	26	11
Nov	16	9
Dec	18	10

Utility Connections Outside City Limits

In 2003, the city processed two requests for utility connection outside the corporate limits, both for water service. Both requests were approved. The city received no requests for sewer hookup outside the city limits.

Site Plan Review and Zoning Compliance Certificates

As of 12-19-03, the staff had issued 248 Zoning Compliance Certificates for the year, including for signs. Most of the non-signage ZCCs included review of a site plan for details such as landscaping, parking, traffic circulation, drainage, lighting, setbacks, height, and other aspects. These reviews entailed considerable staff time in both planning and engineering departments. Often more than one field inspection is necessary to review details or ensure compliance. Every new occupancy permit also requires a final inspection by planning staff for details such as landscaping or parking dimensions.

Geographic Information System

The GIS (Geographic Information System) has been helpful in providing maps for the public as well as city offices. The GIS has also been beneficial in researching property owners for rezonings and contacts in the public hearing process. In the upcoming year, the strategy for the GIS is to include zoning districts and zoning information with the parcel information. The GIS will also be beneficial in the future as a tool for the Metropolitan Planning Organization.

Board/Commission Member and Staff Development

The City initiated a plan commissioner training program near the end of 2002, which continued into 2003. The program provided basic training for the benefit of new plan commissioners. It was also valuable as a refresher course for others, and in addressing changes in planning over the last few years. Special topic sessions for commissioners, as well as a new citizens planning academy, will be conducted in 2004.

Board & Commission Members and Associates; Staff Members

Columbus Plan Commission

John DeLap, president

Gary Nienaber, vice president

Steve Ruble, secretary (City Engineer)

David Bonnell

John Hatter

Shirley Todd

T. Craig Hawes (City Council)*

Jack Heaton

Mike Gillespie (Parks board)

Michael Thomasson**

David Fisher**

Pat Zeigler

Liaison from county plan commission: Tom Finke

Plan Commission Attorney: Alan Whitted

* Mr. Hawes has rotated off the Commission and will be replaced by another City Council member in 2004.

** Mr. Thomasson resigned in July to move to Indianapolis; Mr. Fisher was appointed as his replacement.

Bartholomew County Plan Commission

Roann Whittington, president

Zack Ellison, vice president

Jim Reed (County Council)

Mike Ferree

Tom Finke (County Surveyor)

Paul Franke (Board of Commissioners)

Tom Harmon

Gary Myers

Mark Dodd

Liaison from city plan commission: David Bonnell

Plan Commission Attorney: Cindy Boll

Edinburgh/Bartholomew/Columbus Joint District Plan Commission

Larry Taulman, president

Tim Barrett

Carl Lienhoop

Steve Ruble

Larry Kleinhenz

Ron Richards

Michael Ryan

Keith Sells

Lewis Turner

Jack Heaton

Plan Commission Attorney: Cindy Boll.

Columbus Board of Zoning Appeals

Pat Zeigler, Chair

David Fisher, Vice-Chair*

Karen Dugan, Secretary

Mary Ferdon

Gary Nienaber

Fred Stadler (alternate)

Eric Frey (alternate)

Mike Thomasson (alternate)

BZA Attorney: Alan Whitted

Bartholomew County Board of Zoning Appeals

Philippe Baumann, Chair

Zack Ellison, Vice-Chair

Dewayne Hines

Ron Trotter

Roann Whittington

Tom Harmon (alternate)

BZA Attorney: Cindy Boll

Planning Department Staff

Roger Hunt, Executive Director

Laura Thayer, Assistant Director

Tiffany Strait, Associate Planner

Heather Pope, Associate Planner

Thom Weintraut, Associate Planner

Marcus Hurley, Planning Technician

Sondra Bohn, Planning Assistant

John Butler, Planning Aide

Nicola Vogel, Secretary (part-time)

Patty Whitson (shared with Engineering)